

CHAPTER 24

Job having by his complaints in the foregoing chapter given vent to his passion, and thereby gained some ease, breaks them off abruptly, and now applies himself to a further discussion of the doctrinal controversy between him and his friends concerning the prosperity of wicked people. That many live at ease who yet are ungodly and profane, and despise all the exercises of devotion, he had shown, Job 21. Now here he goes further, and shows that many who are mischievous to mankind, and live in open defiance to all the laws of justice and common honesty, yet thrive and succeed in their unrighteous practices; and we do not see them reckoned with in this world. What he had said before (~~Job~~ Job 12:6), “The tabernacles of robbers prosper,” he here enlarges upon. He lays down his general proposition (v. 1), that the punishment of wicked people is not so visible and apparent as his friends supposed, and then proves it by an induction of particulars.

I. Those that openly do wrong to their poor neighbours are not reckoned with, nor the injured righted (v. 2-12), though the former are very barbarous (v. 21, 22).

II. Those that secretly practise mischief often go undiscovered and unpunished (v. 13-17).

III. That God punished such by secret judgments and reserves them for future judgments (v. 18-20, and 23-25), so that, upon the whole matter, we cannot say that all who are in trouble are wicked; for it is certain that all who are in prosperity are not righteous.

~~Job~~ JOB 24:1-12

OUTWARD PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED

Job's friends had been very positive in it that they should soon see the fall of wicked people, how much soever they might prosper for a while. By no means, says Job; *though times are not hidden from the Almighty, yet those that know him do not presently see his day*, v. 1.

1. He takes it for granted that times are not hidden from the Almighty; past times are not hidden from his judgment (^{<2185>}Ecclesiastes 3:15), present times are not hidden from his providence (^{<4119>}Matthew 10:29), future times are not hidden from his prescience, ^{<4458>}Acts 15:18. God governs the world, and therefore we may be sure he takes cognizance of it. Bad times are not hidden from him, though the bad men that make the times bad say one to another, He has *forsaken the earth*, ^{<1946>}Psalms 94:6, 7. Every man's times are in his hand, and under his eye, and therefore it is in his power to make the times of wicked men in this world miserable. He foresees the time of every man's death, and therefore, if wicked men die before they are punished for their wickedness, we cannot say, "They escaped him by surprise;" he foresaw it, nay, he ordered it. Before Job will enquire into the reasons of the prosperity of wicked men he asserts God's omniscience, as one prophet, in a similar case, asserts his righteousness (^{<2411>}Jeremiah 12:1), another his holiness (^{<3113>}Habakkuk 1:13), another his goodness to his own people, ^{<4971>}Psalms 73:1. General truths must be held fast, though we may find it difficult to reconcile them to particular events.

2. He yet asserts that those who know him (that is, wise and good people who are acquainted with him, and with whom his secret is) *do not see his day*, — the day of his judging for them; this was the thing he complained of in his own case (^{<8238>}Job 23:8), that he could not see God appearing on his behalf to plead his cause, — the day of his judging against open and notorious sinners, that is called *his day*, ^{<1373>}Psalms 37:13. We believe that day will come, but we do not see it, because it is future, and its presages are secret.

3. Though this is a mystery of Providence, yet there is a reason for it, and we shall shortly know why the judgment is deferred; even the wisest, and those who know God best, do not yet see it. God will exercise their faith and patience, and excite their prayers for the coming of his kingdom, for which they are to *cry day and night to him*, ^{<2817>}Luke 18:7.

For the proof of this, that wicked people prosper, Job specifies two sorts of unrighteous ones, whom all the world saw thriving in their iniquity: —

I. Tyrants, and those that do wrong under pretence of law and authority. It is a melancholy sight which has often been *seen under the sun*, *wickedness in the place of judgment* (^{<2186>}Ecclesiastes 3:16), the unregarded *tears of the oppressed*, while *on the side of the oppressors there was power*

(^{<2001>}Ecclesiastes 4:1), the *violent perverting of justice and judgment*,
^{<2008>}Ecclesiastes 5:8.

1. They disseize their neighbours of their real estates, which came to them by descent from their ancestors. They *remove the land-marks*, under pretence that they were misplaced (v. 2), and so they encroach upon their neighbours' rights and think they effectually secure that to their posterity which they have got wrongfully, by making that to be an evidence for them which should have been an evidence for the rightful owner. This was forbidden by the law of Moses (^{<0504>}Deuteronomy 19:14), under a curse, ^{<0577>}Deuteronomy 27:17. Forging or destroying deeds is now a crime equivalent to this.

2. They dispossess them of their personal estates, under colour of justice. *They violently take away flocks*, pretending they are forfeited, *and feed thereof*; as the rich man took the poor man's ewe lamb, ^{<1004>}2 Samuel 12:4. If a poor fatherless child has but an ass of his own to get a little money with, they find some colour or other to take it away, because the owner is not able to contest with them. It is all one if a widow has but an ox for what little husbandry she has; under pretence of distraining for some small debt, or arrears of rent, this ox shall be taken for a pledge, though perhaps it is the widow's all. God has taken it among the titles of his honour to be a *Father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows*; and therefore those will not be reckoned his friends that do not to their utmost protect and help them; but those he will certainly reckon with as his enemies that vex and oppress them.

3. They take all occasions to offer personal abuses to them, v. 4. They will mislead them if they can when they meet them on the high-way, so that the poor and needy are forced to hide themselves from them, having no other way to secure themselves from them. They love in their hearts to banter people, and to make fools of them, and do them a mischief if they can, especially to triumph over poor people, whom they turn out of the way of getting relief, threaten to punish them as vagabonds, and so force them to abscond, and laugh at them when they have done. Some understand those barbarous actions (v. 9, 10) to be done by those oppressors that pretend law for what they do: *They pluck the fatherless from the breast*; that is, having made poor infants fatherless, they make them motherless too; having taken away the father's life, they break the mother's heart, and so starve the children and leave them to perish. Pharaoh and Herod plucked

children from the breast to the sword; and we read of *children brought forth to the murderers*, ^{<393>}Hosea 9:13. Those are inhuman murderers indeed that can with so much pleasure suck innocent blood. *They take a pledge of the poor*, and so they rob the spital; nay, they take the poor themselves for a pledge (as some read it), and probably it was under this pretence that they *plucked the fatherless from the breast*, distraining them for slaves, as ^{<395>}Nehemiah 5:5. Cruelty to the poor is great wickedness and cries aloud for vengeance. Those who show no mercy to such as lie at their mercy shall themselves have judgment without mercy. Another instance of their barbarous treatment of those they have advantage against is that they take from them even their necessary food and raiment; they squeeze them so with their extortion that they *cause them to go naked without clothing* (v. 10) and so catch their death. And if a poor hungry family has gleaned a sheaf of corn, to make a little cake of, that they may eat it and die, even that they take away from them, being well pleased to see them perish for want, while they themselves are fed to the full.

4. They are very oppressive to the labourers they employ in their service. They not only give them no wages, though the labourer is worthy of his hire (and this is a crying sin, ^{<396>}James 5:4), but they will not so much as give them meat and drink: *Those that carry their sheaves are hungry*; so some read it (v. 10), and it agrees with v. 11, that those who *make oil within their walls*, and with a great deal of toil labour at the wine-presses, yet suffer thirst, which was worse than muzzling the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn. Those masters forget that they have a Master in heaven who will not allow the necessary supports of life to their servants and labourers, not caring whether they can live by their labour or no.

5. It is not only among the poor country people, but in the cities also, that we see the tears of the oppressed (v. 12): *Men groan from out of the city*, where the rich merchants and traders are as cruel with their poor debtors as the landlords in the country are with their poor tenants. In cities such cruel actions as these are more observed than in obscure corners of the country and the wronged have easier access to justice to right themselves; and yet the oppressors there fear neither the restraints of the law nor the just censures of their neighbours, but the oppressed groan and cry out like wounded men, and can no more ease and help themselves, for the oppressors are inexorable and deaf to their groans.

II. He speaks of robbers, and those that do wrong by downright force, as the bands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans, which had lately plundered him. He does not mention them particularly, lest he should seem partial to his own cause, and to judge of men (as we are apt to do) by what they are to us; but among the Arabians, the children of the east (Job's country), there were those that lived by spoil and rapine, making incursions upon their neighbours, and robbing travellers. See how they are described here, and what mischief they do, v. 5-8.

1. Their character is that they are *as wild asses in the desert*, untamed, untractable, unreasonable, Ishmael's character (^{<1162>}Genesis 16:12), fierce and furious, and under no restraint of law or government, ^{<4123>}Jeremiah 2:23, 24. They choose the deserts for their dwelling, that they may be lawless and unsociable, and that they may have opportunity of doing the more mischief. The desert is indeed the fittest place for such wild people, ^{<3316>}Job 39:6. But no desert can set men out of the reach of God's eye and hand.

2. Their trade is to steal, and to make a prey of all about them. They have chosen it as their trade; it is their work, because there is more to be got by it, and it is got more easily, than by an honest calling. They follow it as their trade; they follow it closely; *they go forth to it as their work*, as man goes forth to his labour, ^{<13423>}Psalms 104:23. They are diligent and take pains at it: *They rise betimes for a prey*. If a traveller be out early, they will be out as soon to rob him. They live by it as a man lives by his trade: *The wilderness (not the grounds there but the roads there) yieldeth food for them and for their children*; they maintain themselves and their families by robbing on the high-way, and bless themselves in it without any remorse of compassion or conscience, and with as much security as if it were honestly got; as Ephraim, ^{<3317>}Hosea 12:7, 8.

3. See the mischief they do to the country. They not only rob travellers, but they make incursions upon their neighbours, and *reap every one his corn in the field* (v. 6), that is, they enter upon other people's ground, cut their corn, and carry it away as freely as if it were their own. *Even the wicked gather the vintage*, and it is their wickedness; or, as we read it, *They gather the vintage of the wicked*, and so one wicked man is made a scourge to another. What the wicked got by extortion (which is their way of stealing) these robbers get from them in their way of stealing; thus oftentimes are the spoilers spoiled, ^{<2311>}Isaiah 33:1.

4. The misery of those that fall into their hands (v. 7, 8): *They cause the naked, whom they have stripped, not leaving them the clothes to their backs, to lodge, in the cold nights, without clothing, so that they are wet with the showers of the mountains, and, for want of a better shelter, embrace the rock, and are glad of a cave or den in it to preserve them from the injuries of the weather.* Eliphaz had charged Job with such inhumanity as this, concluding that Providence would not thus have stripped him if he had not first *stripped the naked of their clothing,* ^{<8216>}Job 22:6. Job here tells him there were those that were really guilty of those crimes with which he was unjustly charged and yet prospered and had success in their villanies, the curse they laid themselves under working invisibly; and Job thinks it more just to argue as he did, from an open notorious course of wickedness inferring a secret and future punishment, than to argue as Eliphaz did, who from nothing but present trouble inferred a course of past secret iniquity. The impunity of these oppressors and spoilers is expressed in one word (v. 12): *Yet God layeth not folly to them,* that is, he does not immediately prosecute them with his judgments for these crimes, nor make them examples, and so evince their folly to all the world. He that *gets riches, and not by right, at his end shall be a fool,* ^{<2471>}Jeremiah 17:11. But while he prospers he passes for a wise man, and God lays not folly to him until he saith, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee,* ^{<2720>}Luke 12:20.

^{<8213>}JOB 24:13-17

PRESENT IMPUNITY OF TRANSGRESSORS

These verses describe another sort of sinners who *therefore* go unpunished, because they go undiscovered. *They rebel against the light,* v. 13. Some understand it figuratively: they sin against the light of nature, the light of God's law, and that of their own consciences; they profess to know God, but they rebel against the knowledge they have of him, and will not be guided and governed, commanded and controlled, by it. Others understand it literally: they have the day-light and choose the night as the most advantageous season for their wickedness. Sinful works are *therefore* called *works of darkness,* because he *that does evil hates the light* (^{<4711>}John 3:20), *knows not the ways thereof,* that is, keeps out of the way of it, or, if he happen to be seen, abides not where he thinks he is known. So that he

here describes the worst of sinners, — those that sin wilfully, and against the convictions of their own consciences, whereby they add rebellion to their sin, — those that sin deliberately, and with a great deal of plot and contrivance, using a thousand arts to conceal their villainies, fondly imagining that, if they can but hide them from the eye of men, they are safe, but forgetting that *there is no darkness or shadow of death* in which *the workers of iniquity can hide themselves* from God's eye, ^{<382>}Job 34:22. In this paragraph Job specifies three sorts of sinners that shun the light: —

1. Murderers, v. 14. They *rise with the light*, as soon as ever the day breaks, to kill the poor travellers that are up early and abroad about their business, going to market with a little money or goods; and though it is so little that they are really to be called poor and needy, who with much ado get a sorry livelihood by their marketings, yet, to get it, the murderer will both take his neighbour's life and venture his own, will rather play at such small game than not play at all; nay, he kills for killing sake, thirsting more for blood than for booty. See what care and pains wicked men take to compass their wicked designs, and let the sight shame us out of our negligence and slothfulness in doing good.

*Ut jugulent homines, surgunt de nocte latrones,
Tuque ut te serves non expergisceris? —*

*Rogues nightly rise to murder men for pelf;
Will you not rouse you to preserve yourself?*

2. Adulterers. *The eyes that are full of adultery* (^{<424>}2 Peter 2:14), the unclean and wanton eyes, *wait for the twilight*, v. 15. The eye of the adulteress did so, ^{<409>}Proverbs 7:9. Adultery hides its head for shame. The sinners themselves, even the most impudent, do what they can to hide their sin: *si non caste, tamen caute* — *if not chastely, yet cautiously*; and after all the wretched endeavours of the factors for hell to take away the reproach of it, it is and ever will be a *shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret*, ^{<452>}Ephesians 5:12. It hides its head also for fear, knowing that *jealousy is the rage of a husband, who will not spare in the day of vengeance*, ^{<1024>}Proverbs 6:24, 25. See what pains those take that make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts of it, pains to compass, and then to conceal, that provision which, after all, will be death and hell at last. Less pains would serve to mortify and crucify the flesh, which would be life and heaven at last. Let the sinner change his heart, and then he needs not disguise his face, but may lift it up without spot.

3. House-breakers, v. 16. These *mark houses in the day-time*, mark the avenues of a house, and on which side they can most easily force their entrance, and then, in the night, dig through them, either to kill, or steal, or commit adultery. The night favours the assault, and makes the defence the more difficult; for the *good man of the house knows not what hour the thief will come* and therefore is asleep (~~173~~ Luke 12:39) and he and his lie exposed. For this reason our law makes burglary, which is the breaking and entering of a dwelling-house in the night time with a felonious intent, to be felony without benefit of clergy.

And, *lastly*, Job observes (and perhaps observes it as part of the present, though secret, punishment of such sinners as these) that they are in a continual terror for fear of being discovered (v. 17): *The morning is to them even as the shadow of death*. The light of the day, which is welcome to honest people, is a terror to bad people. They curse the sun, not as the Moors, because it scorches them, but because it discovers them. *If one know them*, their consciences fly in their faces, and they are ready to become their own accusers; for *they are in the terrors of the shadow of death*. Shame came in with sin, and everlasting shame is at the end of it. See the misery of sinners — they are exposed to continual frights; and yet see their folly — they are afraid of coming under the eye of men, but have no dread of God's eye, which is always upon them: they are not afraid of doing that which yet they are so terribly afraid of being known to do.

~~173~~ JOB 24:18-25

ULTIMATE RUIN OF THE WICKED

Job here, in the conclusion of his discourse,

I. Gives some further instances of the wickedness of these cruel bloody men.

1. Some are pirates and robbers at sea. To this many learned interpreters apply those difficult expressions (v. 18), *He is swift upon the waters*. Privateers choose those ships that are the best sailors. In these swift ships they cruise from one channel to another, to pick up prizes; and this brings them in so much wealth that their *portion is cursed in the earth*, and they *behold not the way of the vineyards*, that is (as bishop Patrick explains it),

they despise the employment of those who till the ground and plant vineyards as poor and unprofitable. But others make this a further description of the conduct of those sinners that are afraid of the light: if they be discovered, they get away as fast as they can, and choose to lurk, not in the vineyards, for fear of being discovered, but in some cursed portion, a lonely and desolate place, which nobody looks after.

2. Some are abusive to those that are in trouble, and add affliction to the afflicted. Barrenness was looked upon as a great reproach, and those that fall under that affliction they upbraid with it, as Peninnah did Hannah, on purpose to vex them and make them to fret, which is a barbarous thing. This is *evil entreating the barren that beareth not* (v. 21), or those that are childless, and so want the arrows others have in their quiver, which enable them to deal with their enemy in the gate, ^{<4076>}Psalm 127:5. They take that advantage against and are oppressive to them. As the fatherless, so the childless, are in some degree helpless. For the same reason it is a cruel thing to hurt the widow, to whom we ought to do good; and not doing good, when it is in our power, is doing hurt.

3. There are those who, by inuring themselves to cruelty, come at last to be so exceedingly boisterous that they are *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living* (v. 22): “*He draws the mighty into a snare with his power; even the greatest are not able to stand before him when he is in his mad fits: he rises up in his passion, and lays about him with so much fury that no man is sure of his life; nor can he at the same time be sure of his own, for his hand is against every man and every man's hand against him,*” ^{<4162>}Genesis 16:12. One would wonder how any man can take pleasure in making all about him afraid of him, yet there are those that do.

II. He shows that these daring sinners prosper, and are at ease for a while, nay, and often end their days in peace, as Ishmael, who, though he was a man of such a character as is here given, yet both *lived and died in the presence of all his brethren*, as we are told, ^{<4162>}Genesis 16:12; 25:18: Of these sinners here it is said,

1. That it is *given them to be in safety*, v. 23. They seem to be under the special protection of the divine Providence; and one would wonder how they escape with life through so many dangers as they run themselves into.

2. That they rest upon this, that is, they rely upon this as sufficient to warrant all their violences. *Because sentence against their evil works is*

not executed speedily they think that there is no great evil in them, and that God is not displeased with them, nor will ever call them to an account. Their prosperity is their security.

3. That *they are exalted for a while*. They seem to be the favourites of heaven, and value themselves as making the best figure on earth. They are set up in honour, set up (as they think) out of the reach of danger, and lifted up in the pride of their own spirits.

4. That, at length, they are carried out of the world very silently and gently, and without any remarkable disgrace or terror. "They go down to the grave as easily as snow-water sinks into the dry ground when it is melted by the sun;" so bishop Patrick explains v. 19. To the same purport he paraphrases v. 20, *The womb shall forget him*, etc. "God sets no such mark of his displeasure upon him but that his mother may soon forget him. The hand of justice does not hang him on a gibbet for the birds to feed on; but he is carried to his grave like other men, to be the sweet food of worms. There he lies quietly, and neither he nor his wickedness is any more remembered than a tree which is broken to shivers." And v. 24, *They are taken out of the way as all others*, that is, "they are shut up in their graves like all other men; nay, they die as easily (without those tedious pains which some endure) as an ear of corn is cropped with your hand." Compare this with Solomon's observation (²⁰⁰Ecclesiastes 8:10), *I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten*.

III. He foresees their fall however, and that their death, though they die in ease and honour, will be their ruin. God's *eyes are upon their ways*, v. 23. Though he keep silence, and seem to connive at them, yet he takes notice, and keeps account of all their wickedness, and will make it to appear shortly that their most secret sins, which they thought *no eye should see* (v. 15), were under his eye and will be called over again. Here is no mention of the punishment of these sinners in the other world, but it is intimated in the particular notice taken of the consequences of their death.

1. The consumption of the body in the grave, though common to all, yet to them is in the nature of a punishment for their sin. *The grave shall consume those that have sinned*; that land of darkness will be the lot of those that *love darkness rather than light*. The bodies they pampered shall

be a feast for worms, which shall feed as sweetly on them as ever they fed on the pleasures and gains of their sins.

2. Though they thought to make themselves a great name by their wealth, and power, and mighty achievements, yet *their memorial perished with them*, ¹⁹⁹⁶Psalm 9:6. He that made himself so much talked of *shall*, when he is dead, *be no more remembered* with honour; his *name shall rot*, ²⁰⁰⁷Proverbs 10:7. Those that durst not give him his due character while he lived shall not spare him when he is dead; so that the womb that bore him, his own mother, shall forget him, that is, shall avoid making mention of him, and shall think *that* the greatest kindness she can do him, since no good can be said of him. That honour which is got by sin will soon turn into shame.

3. The wickedness they thought to establish in their families shall be broken as a tree; all their wicked projects shall be blasted, and all their wicked hopes dashed and buried with them.

4. Their pride shall be brought down and laid in the dust (v. 24); and, in mercy to the world, they shall be taken out of the way, and all their power and prosperity shall be cut off. You may seek them, and they shall not be found. Job owns that wicked people will be miserable at last, miserable on the other side death, but utterly denies what his friends asserted, that ordinarily they are miserable in this life.

IV. He concludes with a bold challenge to all that were present to disprove what he had said if they could (v. 25): “*If it be not so now*, as I have declared, and if it do not thence follow that I am unjustly condemned and censured, let those that can undertake to prove that my discourse is either,

1. False in itself, and then they prove me a liar; or,

2. Foreign, and nothing to the purpose, and then they prove my speech frivolous and nothing worth.” That indeed which is false is nothing worth; where there is not truth, how can there be goodness? But those that speak the words of truth and soberness need not fear having what they say brought to the test, but can cheerfully submit it to a fair examination, as Job does here.